NEW LITERARIA-
An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities
Volume 8, No. 1, 2026
ISSN: 2582-7375
www.newliteraria.com

Imagining the Nation through Multiple 'Bildungsroman': Badar, Fauzia, and Karim in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Theft*

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Abstract

In his latest novel *Theft*, (2025), Gurnah, winner of 2021 Nobel for literature, returns for its entire setting to Tanzania in East Africa. The action shifts between Tanzania's largest city Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar, Gurnah's town of birth, which is now part of Tanzania, and from where he had emigrated to the UK in 1968. A 'bildungsroman,' the novel charts the lives of three young people Badar, Fauzia, and Karim, whose lives crisscross and intersect at several points in the story. In the process, *Theft* also presents the everyday life of the nation, and the challenges faced by it as it enters a new phase, neo-colonialism, some twenty years into its Independence in December 1963, and a Revolution in January 1964. Using qualitative research as its methodology, this paper, through the story of these three characters, who may be described as 'Children of Revolution', (all three were born in the late 1960s), proposes to examine the novel as the 'bildungsroman' of a nation, Tanzania, at a particular point of time in its history. Leaving behind stories of genocide, political atrocities, slavery, imperialism that featured in his earlier novels, in *Theft*, the writer offers a post-colonial representation of the decolonized nation emerging from the throes of genocidal violence and totalitarian regimes of the 60s and 70s, and trying to grapple with the impact of economic liberalism and neo-imperialism, even as it struggles to build itself on its own terms.

Keywords: *Bildungsroman*, Nation, Economic Liberalism, Neo-colonialism, Identity.